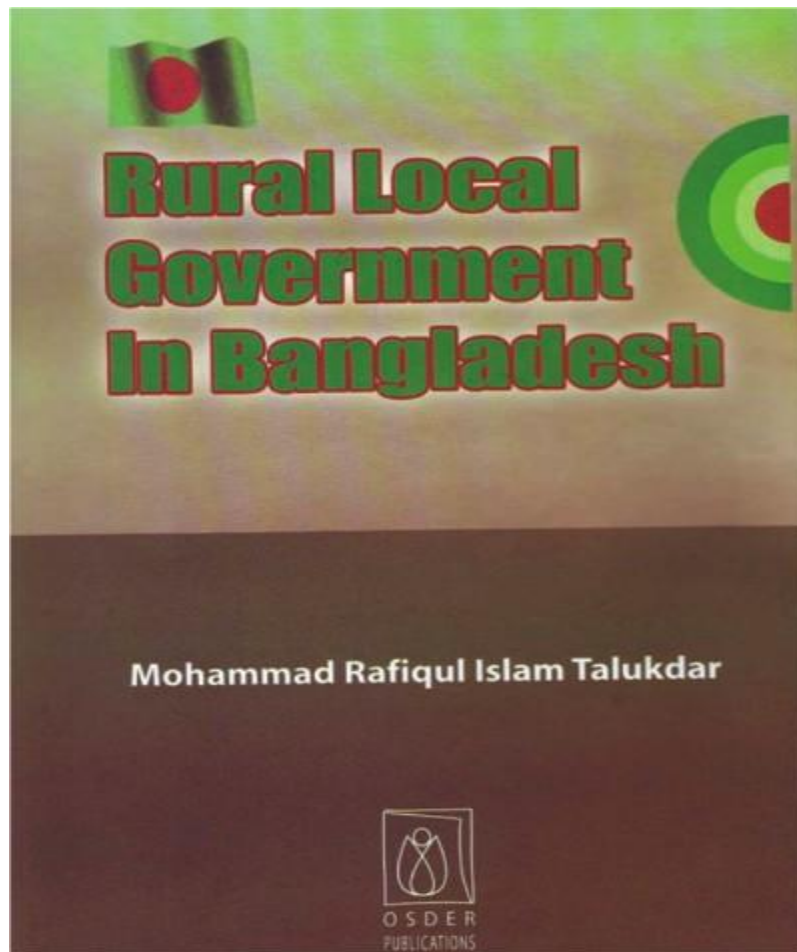


When governance is local government

Audity Falguni highly recommends a new work, for everyone



Rural Local Government In Bangladesh
Mohammad Rafiqul Islam Talukdar
Osder Publications

Local government can be termed as the linchpin of good governance for any modern state, specifically to attain political, economic and social welfare of the marginal groups of people within the state. It is vastly acknowledged in today's development paradigms that

decentralization can be conducive to achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) because local governments are presumed to have better information and higher rewards on the basis of which the central government can afford to plan and implement policies, thus responding to local needs and preemptions. It appears that the reasonable gaps between the political community and the civil society propagation of democratic decentralization are getting widened. They need to be bridged through sincere and stringent academic efforts. Mohammad Rafiqul Islam Talukdar, a young researcher, has brought forth a work relating to this particular arena in a modest way. In *Rural Local Government in Bangladesh*, Talukdar has tried to touch upon a number of pertinent issues, such as democratic decentralization, gender mainstreaming in the local government and the regeneration of the upazila system. But what will appeal to a reader most is the author's ability to convert a hardcore academic subject like public administration into a delectable item for readers to feed on.

The author broadly categorizes his book into two parts and eight chapters. Part One includes the chapters 'Conceptual Framework,' 'Legacy and History,' 'Rural Local Government in Bangladesh and Local Administration and Local Government Ordinances/Acts in Bangladesh.' Part Two consists of 'Development of the Local Government in Bangladesh: Political and Fiscal Perspectives,' 'Gender Mainstreaming in Rural Local Governments and Rural Local Governance,' 'Regeneration of the Upazila System' and 'Conclusion.'

In the first chapter, 'Conceptual Framework,' Talukdar informs us that 'governance does have widespread phenomena such as public management (Hood, 1990), coordination of the sectors of economy (Campbell et al., 1991; Hollingsworth et al., 1994), good governance as a reform objective of state government promoted by WB and IMF (Leftwich, 1994), corporate governance (Williamson, 1996), policy networks (Rhodes, 1997) and public-private partnerships (Pierre, 1998).' He also conceptualizes the concepts of 'Decentralization, Local Government and Local Governance' and elaborates on four forms of decentralization, namely deconcentration, privatization, delegation and devolution in the first chapter.

In the second chapter, 'Legacy and History,' the writer offers us some vivid graphs and charts which portray the organograms of the Bangladesh government from President or Prime Minister down to the upazilla level administration. In addition, he provides us with facts regarding comparative local government administrative structures during the ancient Buddhist and Hindu periods (dating back to 2300 years), Muslim (Sultani era and Mughal/Nobabi era, 1206-1765), British Indian rule (1765-1947), Pakistani rule (1947-1971) and independent Bangladesh (1971-2009). This chapter also outlines the analyses on local government legislations like Chowkidari Panchayat Act of 1870 followed by the Bengal Local Self Government Act of 1885, The Village Self Government Act of 1919 establishing the Union Boards everywhere in Bengal, the Bengal Municipal Act of 1932 or the Bengal Municipal Act 1962. The writer further attempts to give us a clear and concise idea on the local government administrative reforms and changes brought about in six major phases in independent Bangladesh. These periods are: Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman period (1971-1975), Freedom Fighter Major General Ziaur Rahman period (1975-1981), Major General Hossain Mohammad Ershad period (1982-1990), Begum Khaleda Zia period (1991-1996; 2001-2006) and Sheikh Hasina period (1996-2001; 2009- till to date). At end of this chapter the author remarks that 'the establishment of the Local Government Commission, followed by the upazila elections in early 2009, was a milestone

for democratic decentralization. Unfortunately, the successive government has not endorsed the Commission to continue its portfolio. However, there have been (a) couple of recent initiatives that are likely to unlock a number of potential doors for democratic decentralization.' The author correctly observes: '... globally there has been a widespread emphasis on democracy as the current road of decentralization which can be conducive to poverty reduction through a rights-based approach.' He also mentions Articles 9 & 11 (re: promoting local government) and Articles 59 & 60 (re: establishment of the local government) of the Bangladesh Constitution.

In chapter 3 (Rural Local Government in Bangladesh), the structure and functions of the rural local government in Bangladesh with analysis of laws like the Local Government (Union Parishads) Ordinance 1983 or Upazila Parishad (Reintroduction of the Repealed Act and Amendment) Act 2009 have been discussed. It also highlights the structure and functions of the Upazila Parishad, Zilla Parishad and Union Parishads.

In Chapter 4, 'Local Government Ordinances/Acts in Bangladesh,' the young researcher has tried to focus on Upazila Administration in reflection of Article 152 (1) of the Constitution. This chapter also introduces general readers to provisions for administration and logistics in Union Parishad, Upazilla Parishad and Zilla Parishads. Besides, this chapter presents us with the matrix of local administration in Bangladesh, informs us about the Local Government (Union Parishad) Ordinance 2008, Local Government (Upazilla Parishad) Ordinance 2008, Local Government (Pauroshova) Ordinance 2008, Local Government (City Corporation) Ordinance 2008 and Local Government Commission Ordinance 2008.

Chapter 5 deals with the relationship between the central government and local government. Political motives in local government reform initiatives, constitutional aspects and legislative notions, fiscal aspects as well as notions, administrative aspects and Bangladesh perspective on democratic decentralization have also been analyzed. In this regard, the author cites examples of decentralization in Colombia, West Bengal, Brazil, Uganda and South Africa. Concepts and issues of fiscal decentralization, pertaining to the assignment of expenditure responsibilities to different government levels, the assignment of tax and revenue sources to different government levels, intergovernmental fiscal transfers and local governments' borrowing have been underscored in this chapter.

In Chapter 6, 'Gender Mainstreaming in Rural Local Governments and Rural Local Government', the writer begins with the paragraph: 'Despite the extensive debates on the governance and development approach, there is a widespread belief that Gender and Development (GAD) or gender mainstreaming, poverty reduction and local governance are interrelated and likely to be central to the local government, particularly in Bangladesh context'. The author further informs us that in spite of the wide range of discrimination against women in rural Bangladesh, basically owing to the traditional structure of society --- prejudice, unequal land and resource authority, non recognition of their labour and so on --- extensive strides in gender mainstreaming have been made in the field of local governance since the Beijing Conference of September 1995.

Chapter 7 deals with the contextual analysis of regeneration of the Upazila system. The concluding chapter tells of the role of decentralization in fulfilling MDGs, especially poverty reduction. In Appendices, UNDP Study (2008) on the proposed Local Government Commission,

Structure/Models of Selected Countries and Report of the Roundtable Discussion on the Proposed Local Government Commission Ordinance 2008 have been added.

Audity Falguni is a writer, poet and researcher. This review is a reprint.